

THE BECE GRADING SYSTEM COMMITTEE REPORT: Implications for Minimum Educational Qualifications for Basic Education

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ABSTRACT

Five years after the Educational Reform Programme initiated in 1987, national tests, designated Criterion Referenced Tests (CRT), were conducted for pupils in the final year in primary education in regions throughout the country. The CRT results from 1992 to 1997 indicated that, on the average, less than 7 per cent of pupils reached a mastery level of 60 per cent in English Language, and less than 3 per cent of them reached mastery level of 55 per cent in mathematics. In spite of the low attainment observed at the end of primary education, the performance of these pupils at the end of junior secondary education, as evidenced in results of the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE), was surprisingly normal. Some heads of senior secondary schools (SSS) and concerned educators in the country have observed that there is no match between the apparently high achievement of pupils in the BECE and their performance at the SSS level, and for that reason criticized the validity of the BECE. These criticisms led to the setting up of a committee by the Director General of the Ghana Education Service (GES) to examine the BECE and its grading system and make recommendation for its improvement. The committee found **the norm-referenced grading system** with the percentage passes already fixed (also referred to as the '*stanine*' system) which was used in the BECE as the major cause of the inefficiencies. It recommended in its place the use of a **flexible 9-scale criterion referenced grading system** that will reflect variations in the performances of pupils from year to year. The new grading system is based on three key elements:

- Grade Descriptions; i.e. competencies which a candidate obtaining any of the key grades (i.e. grades 2, 6 and 8) should be able to demonstrate;
- Grade Setting; i.e. using Grade Descriptions after marking the examination scripts to advise on scores which will match the key grades.
- Grade Cut-Off Points; i.e. using the set key grades' scores to determine the cut-off scores for all other grades.

The success of the new grading system therefore depends largely on a clearly defined list of grade descriptions for the key grades. This presentation examines the grade descriptions that should match the lowest key grade (i.e. grade 8) which may be considered as the minimum educational qualifications for basic education.